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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ISLAMABAD 002689

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: COALITION CONFIDENT; MUSHARRAF WEIGHING OPTIONS

REF: ISLAMABAD 2664

Classified By: Ambassador Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The media campaign over President Musharraf's impeachment swung into high gear over the weekend as coalition members met to draft an impeachment charge sheet and there was wild speculation about the potential vote count for impeachment. Al Qaeda weighed in with a purported audiotape in English accusing Musharraf of crimes against Muslims. NSA Durrani told Ambassador August 11 that, to his knowledge, there was no evidence to back up Asif Zardari's public accusations that Musharraf stole U.S. Coalition Support Funds.

¶2. (SBU) Following a meeting with Musharraf, Pakistan Muslim League President Chaudry Shujaat said he had convinced Musharraf not to use his political power to dissolve the National Assembly. PML General Secretary Mushahid Hussain said publicly that Musharraf now has two options: face impeachment or resign. Musharraf signed the order calling the National Assembly into session on August 11, and the impeachment process could begin as early as next week.

¶3. (C) We expect the Punjab and Northwest Frontier Province Assemblies to approve resolutions August 11 calling on Musharraf to seek a vote of confidence on his re-election; Sindh and Balochistan are expected to follow suit August 12. Most local editorials echoed that of The Daily Times on August 11: "Abdication is the Only Option." The increasingly harsh tenor of Musharraf's critics led Durrani to wonder whether Musharraf would be able to remain in Pakistan after leaving office. He expressed the hope that "countries friendly to Musharraf" might be willing to provide him with alternatives. End summary.

No Dissolution of the Assembly

¶4. (SBU) Following the Asif Zardari/Nawaz Sharif announcement August 7 that the coalition would seek his impeachment, President Musharraf met extensively with his political and legal advisors. Speaking to the press August 9 after a session with Musharraf, Pakistan Muslim League (PML) President Chaudry Shujaat told the press August 9 that PML leaders had successfully persuaded Musharraf not to use his constitutional powers under Article 58.2(b) to dissolve the National Assembly. PML General Secretary Mushahid Hussain said publicly that Musharraf now has two options:

face impeachment or resign. Most local editorials echoed that of The Daily Times on August 11: "Abdication is the Only Option." Musharraf signed the order calling that National Assembly into session on August 11.

Provincial Action

¶5. (SBU) Pakistan's four Provincial Assemblies are slated to pass this week their own resolutions calling on Musharraf to seek a vote of confidence on his re-election. The Punjab and Northwest Frontier Province Assemblies are schedule to vote on resolutions August 11; the Sindh and Balochistan Assemblies are expected to vote on their resolutions August 12. If Musharraf does not seek a vote of confidence, the National Assembly stands ready as early as August 18 to issue the various notifications that would start the impeachment process. Meanwhile, the Sindh High Court is set to hear a preemptive challenge to the impeachment resolution, but according to constitutional experts, the courts have no jurisdiction over an impeachment resolution.

The Charges

¶6. (SBU) Representatives from the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) met in late night sessions over the weekend to draft an impeachment resolution and charge sheet against President Musharraf. The charge sheet could be presented to the National Assembly as early as August 11.

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¶7. (SBU) In a highly publicized interview with The Sunday Times, Zardari accused Musharraf of misappropriating millions of dollars of U.S. assistance given to Pakistan for supporting the war on terror (i.e., Coalition Support Funds). "Our grand old Musharraf has not been passing on all the \$1 billion a year that the Americans have been giving for the armed forces," said Zardari. "The army has been getting \$250-\$300 million in reimbursement for what they do, but where's the rest?..The rest has been taken by Musharraf for some scheme or other and we've got to find it," claimed Zardari. Zardari also accused Musharraf of deliberate economic sabotage and fomenting conflict in Balochistan.

¶8. (C) In an August 11 meeting with Ambassador and DCM, National Security Advisor Durrani said that, to the best of his knowledge, there is no evidence to support this allegation. Durrani could not confirm or deny reports that the political leadership had prepared a multi-page charge sheet against Musharraf. Much of the reporting, Durrani claimed, was only press speculation and political maneuvering.

The Count

¶9. (SBU) The coalition is waging a fierce media campaign, presumably to convince Musharraf to resign. PPP Minister of Information Sherry Rehman claimed the coalition has the support of 350 parliamentarians on an impeachment motion; PML-N Spokesman Ahsan Iqbal claimed 325. Zardari also predicted an impeachment resolution could receive 350 votes, well over the two-thirds majority of 295 needed. PM Gilani called upon Musharraf to seek a vote of confidence on his reelection, and Law Minister Naek urged Musharraf to resign in order to avoid impeachment. Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) leaders held long consultation sessions this weekend and adopted a "wait and see" policy. Former Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao also remains undecided on his position.

¶10. (C) The coalition is counting on the support of most of the 19 parliamentarians from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), nearly all of the 14 votes from the

smaller ethno-nationalist and religious parties, and about a dozen (or more) "forward block" (defectors) from the PML. PPP Vice Chair Amin Fahim, who questioned the wisdom of dispensing with Musharraf, left for Dubai on news that his son had resigned "for personal reasons" from the Sindh Provincial Assembly.

Al Qaeda Weighs In

¶11. (SBU) On August 10, local media aired an audiotape, purportedly from al Qaeda's al Zawahiri, speaking in English because he "wants to speak directly to the Pakistani people and cannot speak Urdu." In the tape, Zawahiri is quoted as blaming Musharraf for "being thirsty for money and a bribe seeker" who worked to support U.S. and western interests and committed crimes against Muslims all over the world.

A Quick and Orderly Close

¶12. (C) Durrani told Ambassador that it is in everyone's interest to bring the situation to a close in a quick and orderly fashion. Musharraf no longer has any ability to guide governmental decisions, he said. Kayani has "moved out from under his (Musharraf's) shadow," he said. Prolongation of the process will deteriorate into a zoo and, moreover, will only be a distraction from Pakistan's ability to take on more urgent challenges, especially in the economy. He mentioned that he had heard from a friend in the private sector who chastised him for the focus on the impeachment process while the economic situation is reaching crisis proportions. The key, Durrani opined, is to allow Musharraf to leave office with dignity.

Safe Exit?

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¶13. (C) The manner in which the charge sheets are reportedly being drafted raises questions about future lawsuits, even if Musharraf resigns. In response to the Ambassador's question whether Musharraf would be able to remain in Pakistan after leaving office, Durrani said that he didn't know but thought it might be problematic, as Musharraf might be subject to harassing lawsuits and other problems. He expressed hope that, if need be, countries friendly to Musharraf might be willing to provide him with alternatives.

¶14. (SBU) PML-N Spokesman Ahsan Iqbal told reporters August 10 that Musharraf should not be given a safe exit. Sherry Rehman told the press that the coalition will decide if Musharraf will be given a safe exit if he steps down or is impeached. At least 10 PML parliamentarians appealed to Zardari to give Musharraf a way to avoid impeachment.

¶15. (C) Comment: As the media battle over impeachment raged on, there were also reports (septel) of Army and Frontier Corps losses and retreats in Swat and Bajaur, continued humanitarian suffering due to floods in the Punjab and the Northwest Frontier Province, and news that debt servicing has eaten up half of Pakistan's foreign currency reserves. The continued distraction on domestic politics is likely to worsen growing security and economic problems.

PATTERSON